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PARIS FOR ARS
AF/PD FOR CANYASO, TAYBAR, LALLISON AND PEHRNMAN; IIP/G/AF AMURPHY
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SUBJECT: PORT LOUIS: U.S. ELECTION PROGRAMS BOOST MISSION'S
OUTREACH

¶1. Nearly 11,000 miles separate Mauritius from the United States, but distance did not dampen the fascination of Mauritians with U.S. Elections 2008. Responding to the keen interest of its contacts and the Mauritian population at large in the U.S. Presidential Elections, Mission Port Louis organized a series of events, from roundtable discussions, digital video conferences, talks at the University of Mauritius, media outreaches to a "pop-in" brunch and doubled the dissemination of information on the U.S. Elections with IIP products and America.gov articles. These events have been unparalleled occasions for Post to engage key audiences on U.S. society and values, democratic practices and mutual understanding.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. An Array of Approaches and Venues:

¶A. Ambassador's Media Roundtable Discussions:

The race to the White House in 2008 was followed with much interest by Mauritians. The Public Affairs Section (PAS) planned a series of programs on the U.S. elections and kicked off the calendar with a Media Roundtable on the U.S. Elections with Ambassador Cesar Cabrera on Wednesday, April 16 at the Embassy. PAS invited representatives from two leading local dailies, Le Matinal and Le Mauricien, and weekly L'express dimanche to participate in the program. The Ambassador made a 30-minute introduction and gave the journalists an insight into the U.S. Elections process. He then followed with explanations on concepts such as political party rules, delegates, the Electoral College, primaries, and conventions. The Ambassador said that these elections are important and historical, with a female candidate and an African-American candidate. The Ambassador also added that Americans residing in Mauritius and the American employees at the Embassy were encouraged to vote via absentee ballot.

Ambassador Cabrera was in Seychelles at the end of April on a working visit during which he presided over a dedication ceremony for the renovation of Grand Anse Praslin Clinic, funded by the U.S. Government through the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa. On Tuesday, April 22, PAS organized a second roundtable discussion for the Ambassador, this time with Seychellois journalists at the Hilton Northholme Resort. The discussion focused on the intricacies of the campaign then taking place in America.

¶B. Embassy Speaker Program- Talks on the U.S. Elections:

On April 28, the English Department from the Faculty of Social Studies and Humanities of the University of Mauritius welcomed Political and Economic Officer Quentin Barber for a presentation on the U.S. Elections 2008. More than forty five undergraduate students enrolled in the modules "20th Century American Literature." "American Culture and Society," and "Introduction to American Literature" listened religiously to Quentin Barber as he asserted how this year's U.S. Elections have invigorated his faith in the United States as an African-American and emphasized how these

elections will be a great step forward in the history of liberal democracy and human rights regardless of the winner. At that point in the campaign, skepticism was still perceptible in the audience as to whether the United States of America was ready to have a non-white as President.

By the end of October, the U.S. Elections had captured the imagination and fascination of all Mauritians, and all eyes were riveted on "Who was going to be the 44th President of the United States of America". On October 29, the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities of the University of Mauritius sponsored a talk on the 2008 U.S. Elections on the theme: U.S. Elections 2008- What are at stake? Public Affairs Officer Craig White was invited by the Department of Communication Studies to join Vijay Makhan, a politician and former Mauritian Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Commissioner for the African Union to speak on this historic moment in U.S. history. More than seventy students in political science, media and communications and sociology attended the event.

1C. Digital Video Conferences:

Digital Video Conferences (DVC) have always been an important part of Post's outreach, so when ARS Paris offered a Five-Part DVC Series on the 2008 U.S. Presidential Elections in December 2007, Post seized the opportunity. PAS selected four out of the five DVCs on offer and kicked off its DVC series on Monday, May 5, with: Covering a Presidential Election. The DVC focused on election reporting, including the covering of political parties and issues and the voting process. Georges Kazolias, Instructor of Communications at the American University of Paris, was the speaker for the program. Academics and undergraduate students in political science were on the guest list but audience was essentially comprised of Mauritian

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journalists.

The second DVC was scheduled on Monday, September 8, 2008 a few days after the Nominating Conventions and at a time when the U.S. Elections were gathering momentum in the minds of Mauritians and especially the local media. The theme of this DVC was "The U.S. Nominating Conventions." It was led by two speakers, Stuart Haugen, Vice President of Republicans Abroad in France, and Connie Borde, Vice President of Democrats Abroad in France and also a Super-Delegate for the U.S. Democratic Party. Parliamentarians, politicians (including a presidential contender), academics, undergraduate students in Political Science, journalists, and Fulbright and Humphrey alumni constituted the audience.

Wednesday, October 22: only two weeks before Americans elected their 44th President, as the fever of the U.S. Elections of 2008 was reaching its peak, PAS welcomed another batch of participants to its third DVC series- The Electoral College. The program was conducted by Eduardo Cue, correspondent for U.S. News & World Report, and Steven Ekovich, associate professor at the American University of Paris' International and Comparative Politics Department. Journalists, academics, Hubert Humphrey and Fulbright Alumni attended the event. The Head of the Economic Directorate at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Usha Dwarka-Canabady, who recently attended an International Visitor Leadership Program on "Women as Political Leaders" in the United States, also made it a must to be part of the program, which participants unanimously called "the best yet."

1D. Mauritian politician- privileged observer of U.S. Elections under the International Visitor Leadership Program

Mauritian media made much of the leader of the "Mauritian Socialist Movement" (MSM) party, Pravind Jugnauth's participation in the International Visitor Leadership Program "I-Vote 2008." Interviewed several times by local newspapers and especially private radio stations, Pravind Jugnauth stated that it was an extraordinary experience to be able to observe the elections closely as a participant in the program. He explained how the participants were learning how the electoral system functions and how the elections are organized. He also added in connection with the historical U.S. Elections that the way in which elections are held in Mauritius must

also be reviewed.

The topic was also a major theme during a press conference held by the President of the MSM shortly after the departure of Pravind Jugnauth to the United States. Joe Lesjongard stated, "We are glad that he is the only Mauritian invited to follow the presidential elections in the United States...It is a big honor for the leader, the party and the country...This invitation shows the great esteem which our leader has at the international level."

1E. Pop-in Brunch at Ambassador's Residence on D-Day:

In Mauritius, ten hours ahead of Washington D.C., the results of the U.S. presidential elections of 2008 began to trickle in at dawn on Wednesday, November 5. Ambassador Cesar Cabrera and Mrs. Helvetia Cabrera hosted a "pop-in" brunch at their residence to mark an event a former Prime Minister here called "a planetary upheaval." Over 100 guests, including politicians, diplomats, economic partners, expatriates and the media marched into Macarty House in Vacoas shortly before nine o'clock local time amidst a festive decor made up of U.S. flags, a big screen tuned to NBC News, an annex room with CNN Live, a welcome aroma of coffee (after a sleepless night for some) and the sight of fresh croissants, fruits, and hot skilletts ready for pancakes and omelettes. After an historic 20 months of rallies, debates, discussions and speeches, more than a hundred guests made it a MUST to attend this event. A mock polling station was also set up under the veranda. Guests voted with gusto. Macarty House was a busy and noisy place with interviews, live coverage by TV, radio, and newspaper reporters, comments and analysis from guests echoing from all corners. The President of the Republic of Mauritius, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, also honored the event with his presence.

13. Unprecedented Media Outreaches:

Media across the world have reported every twist and turn of the nail-biting race to the White House. Newspapers, radios and televisions have covered this story on a scale never before seen for a U.S. election. In addition, the U.S. elections 2008 have seen more online activity than ever before. Mauritian media were certainly on the front line all throughout the campaign and a day before D-Day, telephone calls from newsrooms across the country started pouring into the Public Affairs Section. As usual, Embassy Port Louis welcomed requests for interviews with open arms.

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On the day of the election, Radio Plus, the number one private radio station in Mauritius, aired a recorded statement of the Embassy's Consular Officer, Jason Hackworth, who was asked the number of registered Americans in Mauritius and to explain how they cast their vote. In its news program at noon, the same radio station conducted a live interview aired from the Embassy with the Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission Virginia Blaser. She was asked to comment (in French) on the "ambiance" prevailing at the Embassy in connection with the U.S. elections. Virginia Blaser also spoke about the historic aspect of this election.

In its news program (in French) on Tuesday, November 4 at 1630 hours, Radio Plus aired some "sound bites" recorded earlier at the Embassy and comments, in French, from the Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission Virginia Blaser and Public Affairs Officer Craig White. They described the "ambiance" prevailing at the Embassy in connection with the U.S. elections and talked about the brunch hosted the following morning at the Ambassador's residence for politicians, diplomats and academics to observe the coverage and results of the election.

Radio One, the second leading private radio station in Mauritius, invited Craig White to participate in its regular live debate program called "Controversy," on Tuesday, November 4 from 1645 hours to 1800 hours. The moderator of the program, which was conducted in French and Creole, was well-known journalist Finlay Salesse. The other participant in the program was Roukaya Kasenally, lecturer in Communication at the University of Mauritius. Craig White, who

spoke in French, was asked to share his views on the electoral campaign and the candidates to the president's and vice-president's posts and the stakes of this historic election. Along with Kasenally, PAO White answered call-in questions from listeners as well.

Still on Election Day, the Embassy's Political and Economic Officer, Quentin Barber, participated in the "Dossier" weekly program broadcast live on MBCTV1 which was on the theme "U.S. Elections - D-Day." The other guest participants in the program were Jean-Claude de L'Estrac (Executive Director of La Sentinelle Media Group and a former chief editor and former minister), Afsar Ebrahim (Partner and Accountant at DCDM BDO Consulting/Audit firm), and Amal Goorah (Executive Officer at Mauritius Telecom and a former student at a U.S. university).

Political/Economic Officer Barber said that the excellent bilateral relations between the United States and Mauritius will not change. Barber thanked his hosts for the chance to "tell America's story," and made extensive comments on the bearing of American history and culture on this historic election. During the program, MBC TV also broadcast a statement by U.S. Ambassador Cesar Cabrera recorded on Tuesday afternoon at the Embassy. Ambassador Cabrera said that after the elections, whoever is elected as president, the U.S. policy towards Mauritius will not change. The relationship has always been consistent and there can only be improvements in ties with Mauritius, a country which is an ally and friend. Ambassador Cabrera mentioned the Third Country Fabric Exemption granted to Mauritius by the U.S. recently under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act.

Radio One again invited Craig White to participate (in French for half an hour) in its special live program which began at 0700 hours on Wednesday, November 5, as early election results from the night before in the U.S. were just beginning to come in. The Public Affairs Officer was asked to explain in broad lines the Electoral College and elections process and to comment on the situation after some of the early returns and early "calls" of Pennsylvania and Ohio.

On the day of the "pop-in" brunch at the Ambassador's residence, a leading newspaper story about the event at Macarty House stated that politicians, diplomats and a big group of the 300 Americans residing in Mauritius would observe live the counting of the votes in the U.S. The article mentioned the "innovation" this year of a mock election. Media presence at Macarty House was enormous on Wednesday, November 5. Reporters circled Ambassador Cabrera for comments and reactions after the proclamation of the final results. Other American officers, including the Deputy Chief of Mission and the Regional Security Officer, were also interviewed for different radio stations.

That afternoon in its news program in French, Radio Plus reported again on the elections results brunch organized in the morning at the Ambassador's residence and aired brief recorded statements from the Ambassador and some guests (which had been already aired in its live special program on the election results in the morning). The other radios also reported on the event and various reactions during

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their news programs.

In its evening news programs on Wednesday night, MBC TV broadcast footage of the brunch. MBC TV reported that "a nice group of personalities," including the President of the Republic, Sir Anerood Jugnauth, were present at this special election morning. The footage also included short statements from Ambassador Cesar Cabrera. Ambassador Cabrera said that it was a historic election and a message of hope. He added that there will not be any change in the excellent ties already existing between Mauritius and the U.S. Electoral Commissioner Irfan Rahman (who helped count the mock votes during the breakfast) said that the fact that the official presidential results were known so fast should inspire Mauritius.

Ambassador Cabrera was again interviewed on Friday, November 7 by weekend newspaper L'express dimanche which dedicated eight pages to

U.S. Elections 2008.

Post also saw a considerable amount of coverage in the weekend newspapers for November 8 and 9, from news reporting to the "people page."

Almost all American officers were involved at one time or another with the media from Monday, November 3 to Wednesday, November 5. This was THE opportunity for the Public Affairs Section to engage with the Mauritian population, and the PAS made the most of it. The Public Affairs Section organized and presented a media briefing for the American potential interviewees, and prepared a kit with possible Qs & As for all American Officers, drawing heavily from America.gov. As a result, American officers were well prepared to step briefly into the spotlight.

4. Publications:

An entire list of webchats was sent to Post's contacts and posted on the Embassy's website and the Virtual Presence Post (VPP) website for Seychelles. Transcripts were sent after the webchats were held.

For each and every single program including talks at the University of Mauritius, infopacks with articles on the Elections and IIP publications "The Long Campaign: US Elections" "USA Elections in Brief", "The Electoral College", "The Candidates" were cautiously prepared. Polls and Think Tanks sent through the AF/IRC List Serve were forwarded to all American Officers and a few LES Staff from the Political/Bilateral Sections. On the day of the election brunch, PAS provided an Election Kit ordered from GPS Manila, which included buttons/stickers for both parties.

5. Results:

The programs organized by Post during the long and intense electoral campaign have been acclaimed by a diverse, passionate and fascinated audience. Embassy Port Louis reached out to politicians, journalists, students, alumni and social groups as never before. In fact, never has a U.S. election captured so much of the attention of the Mauritian population. Its historic cachet was certainly a determining factor in the success of all the events set up by Post. Long-term relationships have been renewed and new ones established. However, what marked these special U.S. Elections 2008 programs was the outstanding outreaches initiated by the whole Mission to the local media. This endeavor allowed Post to disseminate key Mission goals such as the promotion of democratic practices, U.S. society and values and mutual understanding. The involvement of almost every single American Officer at Post in this mission has set up avenues for future and more enriched collaborations between Embassy Port Louis and the Mauritian media.

All sections of the Embassy invested considerable energy in the programs held in the context of the U.S. Elections 2008. The Public Affairs Section certainly had a lot on its plate during the electoral campaign, both prior to D-Day and after the polls gave their verdict. U.S. Elections 2008 has allowed Mission Port Louis to set the pace for enhanced outreaches with a multitude of audiences and is now an energized team more than determined to think Public Diplomacy. The PAS is grateful for the support we received that made these events possible.

CABRERA